

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee Bob Stump, Chairman

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BOB STUMP FULL COMMITTEE MARKUP OF H.R. 2586: FY02 NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

The committee meets this morning to mark up H.R. 2586, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002. Today marks roughly one month from the day we received the Administration's amended defense budget request on June 27.

We have been working around the clock since then with sketchy information to get to this point today in order to keep the defense authorization process on a reasonable schedule. Thus, let me state from the outset that I personally appreciate the cooperative spirit in which all Members have worked through these difficult circumstances. It is clear that none of us would have liked for the defense budget process to develop like it has. Yet, we have done the best possible job with the hand that was dealt to us.

Having said this, it is equally important to note that the budget request before us represents the single largest increase in defense spending since the mid-1980s. The Administration's budget proposal makes great progress in properly funding personnel, readiness and other critical accounts that have been chronically underfunded by the previous administration.

However, in properly covering the operations of the Department of Defense, this budget also highlights how far we still have to go in reversing the damage caused by a decade of steady decline in the modernization accounts. The Administration made a conscious decision to pay the bills to fix the broken defense program it inherited, but only on an installment plan. This year, we fix people and operations. Next year, the bill comes due for equipment modernization and the deteriorating infrastructure.

The committee by and large has agreed with this approach. However, we have also gone through and identified lower priority programs and savings and shifted these funds to cover unfunded requirements as identified by the service chiefs and other priorities.

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I will let each individual subcommittee report on their accomplishments, but suffice it to say that, as in year's past, we have continued to focus on improving quality of life, protecting combat readiness and pushing ahead with badly needed modernization.

This committee has always been characterized by its nonpartisan nature and strong support for protecting our men and women in uniform and their families. This year is no exception, and I want to thank all Members for continuing to further this tradition.

I also want to thank the gentleman from Missouri, the committee's Ranking Democrat, for his support and cooperation in getting us to this point in the process.

Finally, let me express my appreciation and that of all members of the staff. The many long hours, nights, weekends that they have dedicated to getting us to this point often go without notice. But, without their professionalism and hard work, we would not be here today.

Before recognizing Mr. Skelton, I would like to make several administrative announcements. First, it is my intention to finish markup today or tonight. Today will likely be a long day. The committee will almost certainly address issues on which Members have strong feelings so I ask everyone to keep the debate substantive and not personal.

In addition, due to the likelihood of record votes on the floor as well as in here, I urge everyone to promptly return to the markup following floor votes, the lunch break or any unavoidable absences.

I have arranged to have lunch and dinner provided for all of us. At an appropriate point in a few hours, I will suspend markup for 30-40 minutes to allow everyone to eat lunch, which will be in the anteroom. However, I plan to promptly reconvene and continue with markup.

Finally, let me take a moment to respond to the many questions I have been receiving regarding our friend and colleague Floyd Spence. I understand that Floyd is still undergoing medical treatment for a very uncomfortable nerve ailment. I am told that his condition is favorable, although he is still undergoing treatment. I have asked Lindsey Graham, the Vice-Chairman of the Procurement Subcommittee, to cover for him and I am hopeful that Floyd will be back among us soon.

I would now like to recognize the distinguished gentleman from Missouri, the committee's Ranking Democrat, Mr. Skelton for any comments he would like to make.

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